DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 371 579 FL 022 050

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TITLE Teaching Casual Conversation: The Issue of Simplification.
PUB DATE 93
NOTE 21p.; In: Tickoo, M. L., Ed. Simplification: Theory and Application. Anthology Series 31; see FL 022 043.
PUB TYPE Viewpoints (Opinion/Position Papers, Essays, etc.) (120)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *English (Second Language); Foreign Countries; *Instructional Materials; Interpersonal Communication; Language Attitudes; *Language Proficiency; Language Research; Language Usage; *Second Language Instruction; Second Language Learning; *Teaching Methods
IDENTIFIERS *Conversation; *Simplification (Language)

ABSTRACT

This paper focuses on the issue of whether pedagogical mediation will facilitate the acquisition of conversational skills. It argues that it is possible to describe casual conversation, that it has a grammatical structure, and that it is of benefit to English-as-a-Second-Language (ESL) learners for the structure of conversation to be explicitly dealt with. Two central issues surrounding the teaching of casual conversation are (1) whether to simplify the language input or to use authentic data, and (2) whether in fact it is more effective to have no input, but to engage learners in tasks and activities in the classroom that will generate conversation. The paper explores the nature of casual conversation and outlines the differences between classroom discourse and conversational discourse in order to demonstrate that learner-learner interaction, although valuable for other reasons, is not a sufficient basis for the teaching of casual conversation. It is argued that syllabus input should use examples of authentic conversational interaction, with any simplification being in methodology. Suggestions for the teaching of casual conversation are provided. (MDM)

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TEACHING CASUAL CONVERSATION: THE ISSUE OF SIMPLIFICATION

Diana Slade and Rod Gardner

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TEACHING CASUAL CONVERSATION: THE ISSUE OF SIMPLIFICATION

Diana Slade and Rod Gardner

Introduction

Casual conversation is a fundamental human activity which all of us indulge in daily and it is critical in the establishment and maintenance of human relationships. Palmer (Palmer & Redman 1932) argued that language is based on and is an extension of conversation and added that conversation must be the start of a study of language. However, in the decades that followed, the description of language was based on the written word and the sentence was taken as the major unit. This emphasis was reflected in language teaching materials. Only recently has there been a renewed interest and awareness of the importance of the study of conversation and a realisation that this study is essential for any real understanding of the nature and description of language in use.

Despite this growing interest language teaching still does not deal with the teaching of casual conversation in any really effective or systematic way. Most teaching materials do not adequately reflect the nature of casual conversation in English, either because they use constructed data or simplified dialogues (partly reflecting the overwhelming tendency in theoretical studies of conversation to focus on dialogue, not multilogue) or because the situational context, as with most notional/functional textbooks, is invented to provide a vehicle for the target function or structure. In each case these are immediately recognisable as different from naturally occurring language precisely because they leave out many of the essential features of informal spoken English.

In this paper we will focus on the issue of whether pedagogical mediation will facilitate the acquisition of conversational skills. We will be arguing that it is possible to describe casual conversation, that it does have a structure and that it is not formless and ungrammatical as has been argued (for example Beattie 1983), and therefore that it is of benefit to ESL learners for the structure of conversation to be explicitly dealt with.

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The two central issues when discussing the teaching of casual conversation are, first, whether to simplify the language input or to use authentic data, and second, whether in fact it is more effective to have no input, but to engage learners in tasks and activities in the classroom that will generate conversation. First we will explore the nature of casual conversation in English, the intention not being to do this in detail, as this has been done elsewhere (Brown and Yule 1983, Crystal and Davy 1975, Slade and Gardner 1987, Slade 1986), but to highlight those aspects that have particular relevance to the question of pedagogical application. We will then outline some of the differences between classroom discourse and conversational discourse in order to demonstrate that learner-learner interaction, although valuable for other reasons, is not a sufficient basis for the teaching of casual conversation. The paper then goes on to claim that the syllabus input should use examples of authentic conversational interaction, with any simplification being in methodology: in other words in the choice and nature of the task or activity, rather than in the selection of language input. In the final section we will provide suggestions for teaching casual conversation, focussing on an analysis of real language data: of casual conversations at the workplace.

The Nature of Casual Conversation in English

Halliday et al (1985) define casual conversation as person-oriented dialogue where three features of conversation in general are absent in casual conversation. Firstly, in casual conversation the topic is not controlled but drifts as the conversation proceeds. Secondly, inequality is temporarily neutralised. Thirdly, there is no formal mechanism in casual conversation for assigning turns of talk. In summary:

1. There are topics - but no topic control;
2. There are interactants - but no status relations;
3. There are turns - but no turn assignment.

(ibid.:20)

One of the problems with describing casual conversation, both at the level of theory and practice, has been the level of generality of this category. As a result some investigations, for example the work of the ethnomethodologists, focus on isolated fragments of conversation which then make it difficult to posit general principles by which other conversational material can be analysed (for an elaboration of this argument, see Edmondson, 1981: 50-52). Without general principles, it is not possible to see how their work can by exploited for language teaching.

So to make the study of casual conversation less fragmentary and anecdotal it is necessary to distinguish between varieties of casual conversation. In order to do so Poynton's categories for describing personal tenor can be used. These are:

1. The POWER relationships between interactants
2. The FREQUENCY OF CONTACT between interactants; and
3. The AFFECTIVE INVOLVEMENT between interactants

(Poynton 1984: 24-26)

As Eggins has argued, by using these variables it is possible to distinguish for example between casual conversations during a dinner party amongst close friends (see Eggins 1990) where there is high affective involvement and high frequency of contact, and service encounters (see Ventola 1983) where there is low affective involvement and low frequency of contact, and workplace coffee breaks (see Slade 1989) where there is low affective involvement but high contact. These variables then provide a systematic way of differentiating sub-varieties of casual conversation and make it possible to make more rigorous generalisations about what language is likely to occur in these contexts. For example Slade (1989) argues that the data she taped during coffee breaks at three different workplaces is motivated by the exploration of similarity, that is, that the underlying functional motivation of much of the talk in these contexts where people are getting to know each other is to establish shared attitudes and values, to discuss likes and dislikes. This is in contrast to Eggins (1990) data of close friends which she demonstrates is motivated more by the exploration of difference. When describing her conversations Eggins argues that what keeps conversational exchanges going 'is NOT the discovery of unity or accord, but on the contrary the discovery of disunity or disagreement' (p 296).

It is the underlying motivation or the social purpose of such talk that not only determines the text structure and language that will be used, but also what topics are likely to occur. That is, a detailed comparison of Eggin's data of close friends at a dinner party with Slade's data of coffee-break conversations amongst work colleagues, shows that there is a significant difference, not only in what topics or text-types were appropriate, but in the way those were structured (see Slade, 1989). So once criteria have been identified that can be used to specify sub-varieties of the general category of casual conversation, it is then possible to make sharper descriptions, for example one can go some way towards specifying what topics and text-types are likely to occur in this context, and then on a greater scale of delicacy what the text structure and lexicogrammar are likely to be.

Defining the sub-varieties of casual conversation makes the task of designing ESL material for teaching informal spoken English more manageable: it is now possible based on an analysis of the needs of the particular learners to deal with particular sub-varieties (e.g. casual conversation at work), and within these to select the text-types to be focused on. This will be expanded on below.

We will now turn to two important considerations when discussing the teaching of casual conversation: first, whether spoken language is in fact simpler than writing, and if so, in what ways; and second, the crucial issue of the identification of units in conversation. There is a frequent misconception that speaking is simpler than writing, and that spoken language by contrast with written is formless and grammatically unsophisticated. It is claimed that it is ungrammatical and unsystematic and therefore in its authentic form is impossible to teach. This is not so. Spoken language is highly organised and grammatically intricate though in a way which is quite different from written language.

Both speech and writing make use of complex linguistic patterns, but the complexity tends to be of different kinds. As Halliday (1985) explains, the complexity of spoken language is grammatical, it tends to be grammatically more intricate than written. After speakers have departed from quick short turns and take a longer turn, very long utterances will be produced with clause added to clause in a very complex way. Halliday refers to this as grammatical intricacy. In writing, on the other hand, the complexity is lexical, large numbers of context words are typically packed into a single clause. Halliday refers to this as lexical density, and it basically refers to the proportion of content words to the total discourse.

So what learners will find difficult with written English is, therefore, not so much the clause structure, but what can be difficult is the highly information-packed and lexically dense passages of writing. The corollary of this is that what is difficult for ESL learners with spontaneous conversations is not the lexical items, as often these are very general and non-specific, with nominations being used far less than in writing, but the grammatical structuring is what can cause problems. And added to this is the fact that much of spoken interaction is jointly produced discourse, where speakers interrupt, frequently change topics, and where not only the choice of topics can be quite culturally specific, but also the turn-taking signals, the feedback mechanisms and the linguistic indicators of change of topics can cause difficulties and misunderstandings for ESL learners.

The second issue then of equal importance to both theory and application, is what are the units we are dealing with when analysing text[1]. One way of approaching this has been to use the concept of genre. In Systemic-Functional theory this has been developed by Hasan (1985) and Martin (1985). In Variation Theory the notion of text-type, which corresponds to the notion of genre, has been central to much of Labov's work on discourse.

Martin defines genre as 'staged, goal oriented purposeful activity in which speakers engage as members of our culture' (1985: 25). Less technically, it is the way we make meanings with each other in steps to achieve our purposes. There are as many different genres as there are recognisable social activity types in our culture. There are popular written genres such as instructional texts, newspaper articles, magazine reports, experimental procedures etc, and there is an enormous range of everyday genres that we take part in in our daily lives, such as buying and selling, narrating, gossiping and exchanging opinions. All of these genres are ways of exchanging meanings to achieve some purpose.

Martin refers to the overall patterning of texts as the generic structure, and it is a realisation of the social purpose of the text.

For example, Slade has found that gossip texts in casual conversation among acquaintances at work have this generic structure[2]:

Third Person Focus^[Substantiating Behaviour^{Pejorative Evaluation}^(Wrap up)]*

(Probe)

These patterns represent the overall text structure, and it is because of those obligatory stages that we recognize a stretch of text as gossip.

Most of the work on using the notion of genre or text types as one of the units of analysis has been on written text (for example Martin and Rothery 1986, on expository and factual texts), pedagogic discourse, narratives elected for a sociolinguistic interview (e.g. Labov and Waletzky 1966) and interviews (e.g. Labov and Waletzky 1966 and Plum 1988), and service encounters (e.g. Ventola, 1983).

In the final section we will look at the application of generic analysis to the description of actual casual conversational data, and we will highlight those aspects of analysis relevant to teaching.

Classroom Discourse and Casual Conversation

In this section we will look at characteristic classroom interaction, in particular learner-learner interaction, in order to demonstrate that it is not a sufficient basis for the teaching of casual conversation. By looking at the language of classrooms and in particular the language of learner-learner interaction, we hope to demonstrate that in many significant ways this is different from casual conversation spoken outside the classroom. We will argue, therefore, that it is very useful to set up tasks and activities that engage learners in meaningful interaction, but that this is not sufficient in itself, and that if aspects of casual conversation have been explicitly dealt with, by modelling, listening texts etc, then the learners will be better equipped to put these newly learnt language skills into use in a range of activities.

Classroom discourse occurs within a specific institutional setting, with its own norms, rules, roles and relationships, with specific turn-taking conventions, and it will realise a distinctive discourse (see Levinson 1983, Stubbs 1983). Teacher-centred classrooms have a type of discourse about which a reasonable amount is known, for one because of the pioneering work of the Birmingham discourse analysts with their research in classrooms (see Sinclair and Coulthard 1975, Coulthard 1977), and also because of a body of research in the United States (for summaries of this work, see Chaudron 1988, van Lier 1988a). However, we do not intend to consider teacher-centred, traditional classroom discourse, as it is so obviously different from both casual conversation and learner-learner classroom interaction (see, for example, Cazden 1988). It clearly cannot serve as a model.

On the other hand, learner-learner interaction in pairs, small groups and whole class discussions appears to be much more like casual conversation. It could be argued that group and pair work with carefully selected tasks and activities can provide interactional practice for the acquisition of conversational skills (see, for example, Brown 1991 and Long 1990, for some criteria that can be applied to the selection of tasks) and as such can go some way towards modelling such skills. Cazden (1988) says that with free discussions, for example, there is more self-selection by students and more local management of turn-taking, and the discourse resembles 'informal' conversation more, but that it is 'not the same as conversation, because there is still a large group of potential speakers and the educational necessity to stick to the agenda' (p 65-66). And, as we point out below, there are important differences, too. Free discussion or small group work falls short of providing adequate practice for the acquisition of such skills.

In fact, it can be demonstrated that learner-learner interaction is different in important ways from casual conversation. An ethnographic description (cf Saville-Troike 1988) of the classroom will reveal this. In casual conversation, there is an almost imperceptible drift from one *topic* to another (see Sacks, cited in Coulthard 1977). The following example of a coffee break conversation illustrates this[3]. (Collected by Gardner, 1982).

	S;	... (10.0) So what are we doing now
		.. Going home
	A;	I think so yes
		.. I don't know what else to do actually
→		... And the next essay is waiting for me
	S;	@@@ .. @
	A;	Lying round in a corner longing to see me again
	C;	... I think XX
→		... (3.5) But why are you working so hard
		.. Who pushes you

One also finds more radical changes in topic, as in the following example.

	S;	One day dark hair the other day purple hair
		.. you know .. next day pink hair
	K;	@@
	S;	... (3.0) Sometimes rainbows colours why not
→	C;	... (6.5) Did you check your er flight your flight

The topic in the classroom, on the other hand, is usually chosen, or at least restricted by the teacher. Even in learner-learner interaction, the constraints on topic are considerable. In our recordings of such lessons, the topic is constantly being pulled back to the point of the activity. In other words, the classroom has a topical agenda.

The primary *purpose* of casual conversation is social, the establishing or maintaining of social relations. Characteristic genres of casual conversation are phatic talk, gossip, anecdotes, jokes, and narratives drawn from personal experience. Such genres are rarely or only peripherally found in the classroom, where the purpose is to learn certain content or skills, and where the discourse is task- rather than person-oriented.

Casual conversation can occur in almost any *setting*, i.e. almost anywhere, indoors or out. In fact the range of possible settings is endless. The setting in the classroom, on the other hand, is a specific one, with characteristic objects and arrangements of these objects. As Saville-Troike (1988) says, 'the physical setting of an event may call for the use of a different variety of language' (p 74-75).

The *key*, i.e. the emotional tone of the discourse, in casual conversation has high affective involvement (see Poynton 1984). It is often characterised by friendly conflict where close friends are involved (see Eggins 1990, Tannen 1984). In the classroom, in contrast, affective involvement is not sanctioned: certain affects or attitudes, such as anger, strong disagreement, misery, will be considered inappropriate, being clearly marked as incongruous. Prosody, a major carrier of affective messages, is also generally neutral in classrooms. Our classroom corpus also has much less laughter than is found in the casual conversation data.

In terms of the *participants*, the relations between teacher and students are, of course, essentially unequal, those between students equal. Even when an effort is made to exploit the neutral power relations between learners, through the use of carefully selected classroom tasks, the teacher remains in control.

In terms of the *message form*, classroom discourse is peppered with metalanguage. Such overt focus is much less common in casual conversation, and when it occurs, it is dealt with differently, where, for example, participants are more likely to self-correct, and then return quickly to the topic.

Classrooms also have their specific *rules of interaction*, their classroom conventions. These may intrude into what are supposedly free discussions, for example when the teacher corrects an error, or asks a question to which she knows the answer. The following illustrates the teacher's power to impose sanctions.

	S1;	But anyway in normal language .. er .. there are a lot of words	
	S2;	Yes XXX Polish too	
→	T;	I'm not going to teach you one more word unless you've got some X to remember it with	((in the background))

A further conversational phenomenon that is realised differently in the classroom from casual conversation is backchanneling, i.e. the feedback indicating, for example, attention or interest, as in the following example from a coffee break conversation.

J; ... (1.0) to her husband who was then her boyfriend
→ K; ... uh right
J; you see, and they got married and --
→ K; ... mm
J; and um she said she was happier to stay there than to come over here
→ K; ... oh that's interesting

Whilst backchanneling does occur in language classrooms, in particular in learner-learner interactions, it is encountered less frequently than in casual conversation.

In this section we have argued that not only is traditional teacher-centred classroom discourse very different from casual conversation, but that learner-learner classroom discourse is, too. The extracts illustrate some of these differences. Although evidence is lacking in the literature, it may be assumed that the most learner-centred classrooms in which the most loosely structured tasks are utilised may come closer to authentic casual conversation. However, even if this is the case, we would argue that it would be still more efficient to deal explicitly with features of casual conversation, through the use of authentic texts, listening materials, etc. We now will look at the issue of input and the issue of whether this language input should be authentic or simplified.

Simplification in the Teaching of Conversational Skills

If second language speakers are to learn casual conversation skills, it needs to be asked how this can best be achieved. In this section we consider briefly some difficulties with the notion of simplification. We then consider the notion of simplification in the selection of listening materials, and in the selection of tasks and activities for learner-learner interaction.

What do we mean by simplification? It turns out to be a slippery term. Breen and Candlin (1980) offer a word of warning on this point. They say that 'just as any movement from "simple" to "complex" is a very misleading way of perceiving the relationship between any text and its meaning potential - a simple text may realise complex meaning, and vice-versa - it may be wrong to assume that what may be "simple" for any one learner is likely to be "simple" for all the learners' (p 103). So a text can be seen as complex or simple in the eyes of the reader/listener. This can be further demonstrated in the observation of many students who find texts impenetrable at the beginning of a course, and then can read

them with ease at the end. The nature of complexity in language and in thought and ideas is not the same as in the physical world (cf Popper 1972). In the physical world one can claim with confidence that the human organism is more complex than a bacterium. In the worlds of the mind (thought) and of constructions of the mind (such as language) the nature of simplicity and complexity is different. While it may be possible to make preliminary judgements about the complexity of a text in terms of cohesion, of abstract versus concrete language, of lexical density and so on, such judgements need to be reassessed in the light of what the student brings to the class. In other words, texts for listening can only be chosen with reference to learners, using criteria such as cultural distance, student needs in their daily lives, or the conventions in their own languages in conversational discourse.

The question of simplification is not only one of whether materials should be simplified or not, or as a learner variable, but also one of degree of simplification. On this point, Riley (1985) has pointed out that the increasing use of authentic materials in language teaching has led to some simplified materials becoming closer copies of the real thing. They may be better than highly artificial texts, but they are no substitute for recordings of authentic conversations, in that many essential features of casual conversation are still missing. The only way one can be sure of exposing learners to the full gamut of conversational discourse is through the use of authentic conversations.

However, even if the notion of simplification is so slippery, the fact remains that many teaching materials use texts that are highly deficient in many of the features of casual conversation.

Listening materials *can* provide a model for casual conversation if recordings of authentic casual conversation are used. However, examples of authentic casual conversation in teaching materials are hard to find. Even widely used and up-to-date course books are deficient in this respect. The example below is typical of the way in which casual conversation is designed for teaching informal spoken English. What is most striking is the lack of almost all the features of authentic casual conversation as described above. It is from a course book that is widely used around the world, *Headway Advanced* (Soars and Soars 1989), which has a listening tape with 32 recordings of spoken discourse.

Headway also includes two 'conversations' which aim to focus on casual conversation. We reproduce one here.

A short conversation

W = Woman
M = Man

W We had a lovely time at Jim and Chris's last night.
M Did you? That's nice.
W Jim always cooks such wonderful meals.
M Does he? I didn't realise he could cook.
W He's just finished a Cordon Bleu cookery course at night school.
M Has he? Well, I hope we get invited for dinner soon!
W They said they were going to invite you and Sarah next weekend.
M Are they? That's great - I'll look forward to that.

(Soars and Soars 1989: 149)

This 'conversation' is obviously written to illustrate a language point, and it has hardly any of the characteristics of casual conversation discussed above. Indeed, it lacks many of the characteristics of spoken discourse in general. It is highly artificial and, as a model for casual conversation must be considered highly unsatisfactory. It simply lacks many of the characteristic features outlined above: in terms of lexicogrammar, of topic development, of social purpose, of turn-taking, of key, of backchanneling, it rings false.

Many might argue that authentic conversational input is too difficult for learners. However, it is possible to grade conversation materials, for example by using dialogue before multilogue, by using shorter extracts of conversation with more ordered turn-taking and less disagreement, before using longer texts with stronger disagreement, frequent interruptions, topic change.

One can, then, simplify tasks and activities, and, as Widdowson (1987) suggests, 'remedy by artifice the deficiencies of natural processes' (p 83). This can be done by focussing on particular conversational features, requiring learners to engage, for example, in simultaneous talk, talk in noisy situations, or in large groups. They can also be given practice in making forceful claims for the floor, or given roles with differences in power relations, such as boss and employee, or gatekeeper and client.

Casual Conversation at Work: Some Suggestions for Teaching

In this final section we will bring together the arguments we have discussed in the paper so far by looking at an analysis of real language data: of casual conversations collected by Slade during coffee breaks in three different workplaces, and we will discuss the implications of this analysis for teaching.

The approach we took when analysing the data was to try to identify the text types or genres that occurred in the three groups, and to identify across group variations within each type. What became apparent after the initial analysis was that there were parts of the casual conversation data which were analysable generically and other parts which were not.

A very significant amount of the rapid 'chat' of casual talk does not reveal a generic structure, but there are certainly stretches of language that hang together and make sense. While it is always possible to assign a beginning^(middle)^end structure to any talk (since we always start somewhere, finish and usually do something in between), it is impossible to assign a generic structure to the parts of the "chat" segments that in any way predict the completion of the conversation. That is, one problem in analysing conversations is that it appears to consist of different kinds of talk: what I will call for the moment the *chunks* and the *chat*.

Table 1: Text Types in Coffee-break conversations at work: (across three different groups)

		Nos.	Percentages
1.	Narratives	7	4
2.	Anecdotes	14	8
3.	Recounts	14	8
4.	Observation/Comment	17	10
5.	Opinion	7	4
6.	Joke-telling	4	2
7.	Gossip	8	5
8.	Sending-up	12	7
9.	Chat	87	51

The distribution of the text-types that occurred in the three groups taped are listed according to gender breakdowns elsewhere (see Slade 1989) and so for the purposes of this paper it is sufficient just to list what text-types occurred across the three groups and their frequency. These are listed in Table 1. The significance of this for teaching is firstly that many of the more frequent text-types are rarely represented adequately in language teaching materials, and secondly as can be seen from the table there is a significant proportion of the data that displayed no generic structure - those sections we labelled 'chat'. These also need to be taken into account in questions of pedagogy.

What can be seen immediately is that the most frequently occurring stretch of talk, apart from the 'chat' sections, were the observation/comment genres, the recounts, and the story-telling texts (the anecdotes and narratives). Less frequent were the gossip texts, sending-up, joke-telling, and the opinion-texts.

We will not go into the text-types in detail here (see Slade 1989 for further details), but in Table 2 we list the generic structure of each of the text-types specified in table 1.

Table 2: Generic Structures of Text-types

1. *Narratives* - (Abstract)^(Orientation)^Complication^Evaluation^Resolution^(Coda)
   [Labov and Waletzky 1966]
2. *Anecdotes* - (Abstract)^(Orientation)^Crisis^Reaction^(Coda)^(Completion)
   [Plum 1988]
3. *Recounts* - (Abstract)^Orientation^Record^Reorientation^(Coda)^
   (Completion)
   [Plum 1988]
4. *O/Comment* - (Orientation)^[Observation^(Comment)]^(Coda)^(Completion)
   [Martin and Rothery 1986]
5. *Opinion* - Opinion^Reaction^(Evidence)^(Resolution)
   [Horvath and Eggins 1986]
6. *Gossip* - Third Person Focus^[Substantiating Behaviour^((Probe))]^(Wrap-Up)]^{n}
   (Pej.Eval)
   [Slade 1989]
7. Joke-telling
8. Sending Up
9. Chat

As each of these genres has a characteristic structure, they can be taught. We will not go into detail here, but the important point to stress is that what distinguishes the stages of generic structure is that they fulfil a functionally distinct role and therefore the lexico-grammatical realisation varies for each stage.

The implications of this for language teaching should now be clear. There is a proportion of casual conversation, the 'chunks' that can be described generically and about which generalisations can be made, not only about the generic structure, but about the linguistic realisation of these stages. As this structure can be defined, it can therefore, we argue, be taught explicitly. So the syllabus design can have sections on the text-types specified above, for example the materials designed for teaching casual conversation by Slade and Norris (1986) have sections on narratives, opinion texts, gossip etc.

This brings us to the elements of the conversations that we labelled 'chat' - that portion of a conversation that does not display a generic structure. As one reads down the list on Table 2, it becomes less possible with each entry to make a description in generic terms; the more interpersonal meanings are foregrounded, the more inherently dialogic the texts are, the less they are able to be described as text-types with a clear generic structure. So at the one end there are the narratives which display a clear generic structure, and at the other end there is sending-up, which needs to be looked at prosodically, where the elements that are characterised as sending-up are dispersed throughout the text and not realised as discrete stages.

With a generic structure analysis, one models linguistic interaction as structurally complete generalisable wholes. So the generic structure of a text is by definition closed, as it is modelled as a constituent or multivariate structure made up of functionally distinct stages which we can generalize as a beginning^(middle)^end formulation. Thus a generic structure describes discourse structure by analogy with multivariate grammatical structures, such as those of the clause. So what is meant by this is that a beginning^(middle)^end generic structure is a structure of the same kind as sensor^process^phenomenon^circumstances where the elements are 1) distinct in function, 2) realised by distinct classes, and 3) more or less fixed in sequence. And so we are arguing that generic structure is likewise modelled as a multivariate structure. Like all multivariate structures, generic structure is one of completion: elements of schematic structure are functionally distinguished and labelled in terms of their role in bringing the overall interaction to an end.

The limitation with this is that most accounts of text in these models have a synoptic bias which ignores any dynamic or real time aspects of their realisation. It is clear from this that in order to be able to describe conversation, one needs not only to be able to account for the text-types or genres (the macrostructure of conversation, which are amenable to a synoptic description), but that one also needs a model that can approach conversation dynamically, as process. Such a model would need to be able to describe the microstructure of conversation. One model that has attempted to do this is the Eggins model of conversational analysis, and she

has provided a classification of different speech functions, using the move as the basic unit of conversation, and then describing the function of each move (for further details see Eggins 1990)[4]. The aim of this analysis is to capture any relationships that exist between adjacent moves. So the concern is how does one move lead to another.

This is an important model for language teachers, as it gives an analysis that can help look at the dynamic process of conversation - that is it can help account for the 'chat' sections, and by looking at the different speech functions of conversation how one move leads to another.

To summarise, we are arguing that in both theory and practice, in both the teaching and analysis of casual conversation, we need to be able to account for the macro- and microstructure of conversation, that we need to be able to capture both the generically structured 'chunks' of conversation and those aspects of conversation that do not display a generic structure. We need to see conversation as purposeful behaviour, both realised in and instantiating social and cultural context and as a process of making meanings. And as language is the realisation of contextual demands, we need an analysis that can show the relationship of context to text and text to lexico-grammar.

In second language teaching, learners need to be guided in how to predict from generalised contexts what kind of social process or genre they can expect, and then on a greater scale of delicacy what kind of text, and in turn what communicative skills, strategies, lexico-grammar will be appropriate for the realisation of that text. That is, they need to be able to predict what kind of language will be appropriate for the particular situations they will be involved in. So for teaching we are arguing that first, there is a need to specify the variety of casual conversation most relevant to the particular group of learners; and then to look at the genres most likely to occur in these contexts; and then on a greater scale of delicacy the likely linguistic features of these genres. This then can be used as the basis for the syllabus selection. In addition, as a way of dealing with the microstructure of the conversation, there can be sections on different speech functions, for example looking at the speech function classes the learners will need in different situations and how these speech functions are realised.

Importantly though, as work on the analysis of the dynamic aspects of conversation is still at a very early stage, it is important that the methodology employed has tasks and activities that enable learners to interact in as realistic contexts as possible. So the 'chunks' of conversation can be dealt with in the syllabus design and the 'chat' aspects can be dealt with partly by explicit analysis

and modelling of different speech functions, but also by immersing students in tasks and activities that will enable them to be engaged in the dynamic process of conversation.

Conclusion

We have argued that the use of simplified, constructed conversational texts is not an adequate basis for the teaching of casual conversation, as many of the language features of real discourse are omitted. On the other hand, the recent movement to have no explicit language input, but rather to engage learners in tasks and activities that generate language, although worthwhile for other purposes, is not the most efficient basis for teaching informal spoken English. Rather we are arguing for a syllabus design and methodology that essentially complement each other, with a syllabus design that uses authentic conversational extracts, dealing with the subvariety of casual conversation most relevant to the particular learners (for example, casual conversations at dinner parties or at work) and a methodology that engages learners in meaningful and purposeful interaction. Such a methodology will be the more effective, we argue, because of the explicit input and modelling of features of conversation.

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Notes

1. The very problem of functional syllabuses (Wilkins 1976) is the fact that the basic units, the functions, are not linguistically motivated. There is no systematic relationship between form and function, and decisions on the interrelationship and ordering will be, by necessity, arbitrary. And as many have pointed out (for example, Coulthard 1975, Widdowson 1979, Candlin 1980), the learning of discrete, analytical 'communication' categories are unlikely to be more representative of real language use than learning isolated sentences.

2. ^ means that the element on the right follows that on the left, ( ) indicates that the element is optional [ ] indicates domain of recursion. ^{n} means recursion (so the sequence from Substantiating Behaviour through to Wrap-up may be repeated a number of times, and { } means either/or.

3. The transcription is a simplification of Du Bois et al 1988. @ indicates laughter. X indicates unheard syllable. .HH indicates inhaled breath.

4. The move is the basic analytical unit for the analysis - it is a semantic unit, defined as the smallest unit of potentially negotiable information presented by one speaker within one turn of interactive talk. It is the discourse unit considered to carry the pattern of interactive function in dialogue. Grammatically a move is a realisation of a constituent grammatical structure, a major clause that selects independently for mood, or a non-finite or minor clause. Martin defines a move as 'a discourse unit whose unmarked realisation is a clause selecting independently for mood' (Martin in press).